



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **NAVAL ACADEMY ASKED TO RECOGNIZE GAY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION**

New group includes gay and lesbian veterans

ANNAPOLIS, MD, November 7, 2003--For the first time, a United States service academy alumni association will be asked to recognize its gay, lesbian, and transgendered graduates by creating a chapter for those civilian alumni who are now out to their friends, family, and workplace.

On November 11, Veteran's Day, former U.S. Navy officer Jeff Petrie and a contingent of other former naval officers who served with distinction will present David Church, the Director of Career Programs at the United States Naval Academy Alumni Association, a proposal to establish a gay alumni association chapter--USNA Out.

The contingent will present the alumni association leadership with the bylaws and a roster that any other budding alumni chapter would be required to submit in order to organize.

Among those requirements is a list of at least 25 chapter members. Petrie, a 1989 Naval Academy graduate who is gay, has worked with fellow graduates and the unrecognized Service Academy Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association to contact 29 other former officers who are out of the Navy and Marine Corps now and are willing to come out to their classmates and to the academy.

Under the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, gay and lesbian servicemembers are allowed to serve in the United States armed forces, but are not permitted to tell the soldiers and sailors they work alongside about their sexual orientation.

"I see a time coming soon when things are going to change for the better for gays and lesbians in our nation's armed forces," said Petrie.

"I believe one of the most helpful actions we can take for the school we still love is to lend our wealth of various experiences to an eventual Naval Academy effort directed toward better integrating gay students. The environment at Annapolis has been disapproving and damaging for high-achieving gays and lesbians for many years. All 30 of us have lived through that." Petrie knows that there are actually many more than 29 alumni like him who have made it through the rigors of Annapolis and the years of



Navy or Marine Corps service that follow.

The president of Gay Lesbian Service Members for Equality, an organization of gay and lesbian service members who are currently serving in the military, agrees that the visibility of service academy alumni is important for students in the academy. Unable to be identified by name, he believes USNA Out will improve the lives of gay men and lesbians who are in the military. "Fostering the integration of gay students at the level of the service academies will certainly help create a sense of tolerance that will eventually impact life in the military itself," he said. "We hope to see these trends continue, so that someday no academy student or service member has to fear retribution due to their sexuality."

Aaron Belkin, director of the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, an official research unit at the University of California, Santa Barbara, says that the experience of foreign military organizations indicates that the U.S. ban on gay personnel is not based on military necessity. "Twenty-four countries have lifted their gay bans without problems," he said.

Ultimately, Petrie wants to help the next generation avoid the hardships he and others faced. "Now we will wait for a decision on USNA Out."

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The Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military is an official research unit of the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center is governed by a distinguished board of advisors including the Honorable Lawrence J. Korb of the Council on Foreign Relations, Honorable Coit Blacker of Stanford University and Professor Janet Halley of Harvard Law School. Its mission is to promote the study of gays, lesbians, and other sexual minorities in the armed forces.

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